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ABSTRACT

A study was designed to determine if the classifications and definitions of context clues suggested in ten reading methods textbooks were used in three basal reading series. The method textbook analyses provided 27 different context clues. The analysis of the basal reading series--D. C. Heath (1983), Ginn (1984), and Scott, Foresman (1983)--showed that they did not specify any particular classification of context clue. The D. C. Heath series did teach homophones, homographs, and idioms through the use of context. A great many of the activities required the student to use experience to complete a thought. Concerning quantity, Scott, Foresman was ahead with 364 contextual activities, followed by D. C. Heath with 189 activities and Ginn with 75 activities. However, Scott, Foresman categorizes vocabulary introduction activities as vocabulary in context. (HOD)

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USEFULNESS OF CONTEXT CLUES AS DETERMINED BY AN ANALYSIS OF BASAL READING SERIES AND METHODOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

Presented at:

Thirtieth Annual IRA Convention
1985: New Orleans

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INTRODUCTION

> Remind pupils that they can often learn the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a sentence by looking carefully at the rest of the sentence. If there are not enough clues in that sentence, they should look at the other sentences in the paragraph, both those preceding and following the sentence with the unfamiliar word. Point out that the context sometimes gives an exact definition, but usually gives only clues that pupils must put together to find the unfamiliar word's meaning (Ginn and Company - Level 12, 1984).

The above paragraph represents a typical context clue review lesson that can be found in most basal readers. I am reminded of my first reading class as an undergraduate student and the text of Paul McKee (1948). When I retrived this book from my dusty bookcase, I found that I had underlined the following as an important idea to remember:

> It is indeed unfortunate that, although teachers admonish pupils to use the context to find the meaning of a strange word or group of words, very few children receive any definite instruction in how to use the context. The result is that many of our pupils and students have little if any skill in using this important tool (p. 73).

Almost all textbooks used in reading method courses have some statement concerning the use or importance of context clues and reading. There are statements such as:

> Context clues are perhaps the most important single aid to word perception (Gray, 1960, p. 25).
>
> Contextual clues provide one of the most important aids to word identification (Carter and McGinnis, 1962, p. 84).
>
> It would be difficult to overestimate the value of the context in children's word perception (Cordts, 1965, p. 16).
>
> Context clues can help children make educated guesses about the identity of unfamiliar words (Burns and Roe, 1980, p. 117).
>
> As children progress in reading, there are more and more occasions where physical context and pictures are not very useful, and they need to rely on the language of the text to help identify words they do not immediately recognize (Finn, 1985, p. 128).

> Context analysis is probably the major tool for building a semantic vocabulary (May, 1982, p. 55).

The above represents some of the historical statements concerning the usefulness of context clues. These statements indicate that the use of context clues have long been considered as being very valuable in aiding a child to recognize words and as an aid in getting meaning. The instruction in using context however has been lacking in many classrooms. Teachers have told children to try to "guess" what the unfamiliar word might be from the meaning of the sentence. As a result of this practice many children have not developed the technique of using context.

Many professors of reading in teacher preparation programs have, including the writers, introduced and tested their students on their knowledge of specific context clues. Many of these context clues were based on a classification suggested by McCullough (1943, 1945). We believe at times professors of education should examine what they are teaching in light of what is being taught in our schools. This is not to say either one is right or wrong but we need to begin to compromise to get the best of both "worlds."

The purpose of this paper is not to agree or disagree with the importance of context clues but to investigate if there is a match between what the textbook writer say to perspective teachers and what is really being taught in the basal materials which is probably the most widely used materials for teaching reading.

Before dealing with the primary purpose of this paper an understanding of context clues needs to be developed. Harris and Hodges in IRA's Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms (1981) define a context clue as:

> an item of information from the immediate setting in which a word or group of words occurs, as surrounding words, phrases, sentences, illustrations, syntax, typography, etc., that might be used to help determine the meaning and/or pronunciation of the word or word group in question (p. 67).

Emans (1969) has identified four uses of context clues.

1. Context clues can help children to identify words they have identified before, but have forgotten.
2. Context clues may be combined with other word analysis clues, e.g., phonic and structural analysis, to check on the accuracy of words tentatively identified by the use of other clues.
3. Context clues help in the rapid recognition of words for all readers by helping us to anticipate what a word might be.
4. Context clues are required for the correct indentification of some words.

CLASSIFICATION OF CONTEXT CLUES

Various attempts have been made to classify context clues into distinctive categories. Mccullough (1943, 1945) has suggested seven common types of context clues that should be developed:

1. Definition. The unknown word may be defined in the passage.

2. Experience. Children may rely upon their past concrete experience to supply the new word.

3. Comparison or contrast. The unknown word may be compared or contrasted with something known.

4. Synonym. This type of clue consists of a known synonym for the unfamiliar word.

5. Familiar expression. This clue requires a knowledge of common expressions or idioms which may be anticipated easily before they are completed by the speaker.

6. Summary. In this clue the new word may summarize the ideas that precede it.

7. Reflection of a mood or situation. The general tone of the sentence or paragraph sometimes suggests a clue to the new word.

Artley (1943) has indicated the importance of typographical and structural aids as clues to word meaning. Typographical clues such as quotation marks, italics, and bold face type may call attention to new words. Although these devices have no value in determining meaning, they do emphasize the fact that the word is probably an unfamiliar one. Other aids such as parentheses, footnotes, or glossary references provide an explanation which is superior to the dictionary because they refer to the word in its context. For example:

1. Typographical Aids

   a) quotation marks - Travelers on the desert may see a "mirage" of palm trees and water.

   b) italics - Travelers on the desert may see a *mirage* of palm trees and water.

   c) capital letters - Travelers on the desert may see a MIRAGE of palm trees and water.

   d) parentheses - Travelers on the desert may see a mirage (a scene which is really somewhere else) of palm trees and water.

   e) footnote - Travelers on the desert may see a mirage* of palm trees and water. At bottom of page *mirage - an appearance of a scene which is really somewhere else, due to conditions of the air which makes it reflect images of distant objects.

2. Structural Aids

a) a positive phrase or clause - Much of the arctic region is covered by tundra, a treeless plain.

b) non-restrictive phrase or clause - Much of the arctic region is covered by tundra, which remains frozen even in the summer.

c) Interpolated phrase or clause - Tundra - a frozen, treeless plain - covers much of the arctic region.

The teacher should guide children to understand that commas and dashes are often helpful clues which tell them to go slowly and look for meaning.

A caution has been suggested by Russell (1961) concerning the McCullough and Artley classifications that perhaps these types of classifications are too technical for systematic use in elementary schools. Russell's caution and a desire to provide preservice teachers with correct and useful information has prompted this paper and study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The major purpose of our study was to determine if the various classifications and definitions of context clues suggested in many reading methodology texts were in fact being taught in basal reading programs. Amoriell and Hofler (1984) attempted to analyze various commercial materials that "sensitized children to semantic cues," and found "no organized or consistent development of different types of semantic cues" (p. 383). They also found that only one type of semantic clue was developed and this clue represented the experience type semantic cue. These researchers further stated that after " an analysis of 1072 semantic cues in literature appropriate for elementary/middle-school levels supported the existence of seven types of semantic cues" (p. 383). The following types of semantic cues were found:

Type	Category	Percent of Occurrence
I	Explanation/Appositive	13%
II	Experience	24%
III	Mood/Tone	9%
IV	Example	7%
V	Summary	19%
VI	Synonym	21%
VII	Comparison/	7%
	Contrast	7%

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The first part of the study consisted of analyzing ten methodology textbooks that are geared for reading method courses in teacher training colleges and universities. The context clues, definitions and examples were categorized into 27 different context clues. The second part of the study consisted of analyzing three basal reading series to determine if the teaching activities included in the teachers' manuals under context clues matched the categories found in the methodology textbooks. For example in the category of Definition, did the basal reading series teach a specific Definition clue? The third part of the study was to determine if the manuals did not identify a specific activity as a Definition clue, could we identify the activity as a specific context clue category and develop a priority list of the occurrences in each category?

TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

Ten textbooks were used for the study. These books were chosen based on the recency of copyright dates and the fact that some are or have been used in our methods courses. Table 1 represents the ten textbooks used for this study. Texts A and F suggested McCullough's seven context clues. Table 2 presents the twenty-seven context clues, definitions and examples found in the ten textbooks.

Table 1
Methodology textbooks used

A. Teaching Them to Read, 4th edition, Dolores Durkin, Allyn and Bacon, inc., Boston, Mass., 1983.

B. Teaching Reading to Every Child, Diane Lapp and James Flood, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1978.

*C. Content Area Reading, Mary M. Dupuis and Eunice N. Askow, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1982.

D. Teaching a Child to Read, Roger Farr and Nancy Roser, Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1979.

E. Elementary Reading: A Comprehensive Approach, John N. Manfieri and Lois A. Bader, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1980.

*F. Teaching Reading, J. Estill Alexander et al. Little, Brown and Co., Boston, Mass., 1979.

G. Teaching Reading in Today's Elementary Schools, Burns, Roe and Ross, Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass., 1984.

H. Reading As Communication, Frank B. May, Charles Merrill, Columbus, Ohio, 1982.

I. The Teaching of Reading, Martha Dallman et al. CBS College Publishing Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982.

J. Developmental Reading, K-8. Teaching from a Psycholinguistic Perspective, Daniel Hittleman, 2nd ed., Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1983.

*Indicates use of McCullough's seven context clues.

Table 2
Context clues, definitions and examples

1. Definition - To introduce and define the words within the same context.
   Ex. The cornea is the transparent outer coating of the eyeball.

2. Experience - To use past experiences to complete a thought.
   Ex. Jack gave his dog a _____ to chew.

3. Comparison or Contrast - The unknown word is compared to something known.
   Ex. You do not have to run, you can _____.

4. Synonym - The use of words with similar meanings within the same text.
   Ex. I hanker to visit California. This restless longing never ends.

5. Familiar expression - The word is recognized by its use in a familiar language pattern or verbal expression.
   Ex. "See ya later, alligator!"

6. Summary - A detailed account of the happening is given. (Grouping various previous concepts.)
   Ex. Mary is a student who is interested in intellectual inquiry as well as research. She has a curious creative mind. Mary is beleived by many to be inquisitive.

7. Reflection of a Mood or Situation - The tone or mood or a sentence suggests the nature of the new word.
   Ex. The old cellar was dim and cool and quiet. After being out in the sun all day, it was a relief to go down there.

8. Simile - The words as and like are used to introduce a simile.
   Ex. Her hair was as blond as harvest wheat.

9. Apposition - The meaning of a word is expressed directly after word and is set off by commas.
   Ex. The gully, a deep ditch, was full of water.

10. Antonym - a word that is opposite in meaning from another.
   Ex. Yesterday Ann was unhappy with her job, but today she is elated.

11. Groupings - An unfamiliar word is classified in context with other words that depict similar meanings.
    Ex. His tie was a combination of many colors: yellow, red, and chartreuse.

12. Picture clues - Fine line sketches are drawn to illustrate sentence or word meaning.
    (picture of truck)
    Ex. Annie drove the _____ down the highway.

13. Lexical clues - A clue that relates to the vocabulary of a language as distinguished from its grammar and construction.
    (bottle)
    Ex. _____, the rich and creamy white substance, is made of egg yolks and oil.

14. Relational clues - The words in the context relate to the missing word.
    Ex. The girl in the green bathing suit dove into the _____ with her arms stretched above her head.

15. Interpretative clues - To use the context of the sentence to interpret meaning.
    Ex. The dazzling light was like a _____ in the darkened sky.

16. Semantic clues - A package of clues provide meaning to the unfamiliar word.
    Ex. Emily Bronte grew up on the English moors. There were rolling hills covered with little shrubs and clumps of long grass. The ground was soggy and the air was damp.

17. Inferences - To piece together the meaning of a word without a literal definition.
    Ex. Peter got up early and knew it would be a glorious day. Sunlight played on the lawn while white clouds puffed by. The birds were singing like crazy.

18. Figures of Speech - To compare a familiar part of a phrase with the less familiar.
    Ex. The puppet moved like a tiny man, old and bent.

19. Idioms - words or phrases that do not mean what they say on the surface; they cannot be literally translated.
    Ex. The neighbors had fought for years over small things. One day they talked it over and decided to bury the hatchet.

20. Cause and Effect - One part (either cause of effect) is familiar to the child. If the reader has experience with one part, the other can be discovered.
    Ex. Billy was late getting home for dinner again. He knew he might be punished.

21. Syntactic clues - The way that the words being used in certain ways mean in relation to each other.
    Ex. Jenny was able to ride her tricycle much faster that her brother.

22. Example clues - Similar to a simile but more explicit.
    Ex. The letters "un" are a common prefix in our language, as in unhappy, unclean, and untrue.

23. Building Block clues - These are simply derivatives - words built by adding suffixes and other word parts.
    Ex. She unwillingly walked to school.

24. Referral clues - no defintion available

25. Main idea - no defintion available

26. Preposition - no definition available

27. Restatement - Sentences containing appositives, the punctuation marks of parenthesis and dashes, and the words in other words.
    Ex. The parcels all were sent down a chute - a kind of slide - into the storeroom below.

Table 3
Context clues and methodology textbooks

Context clue	methodology textbooks									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
DEFINITION	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
EXPERIENCE			x			x			x	
COMPARISON OR CONTRAST			x	x	x	x	x		x	
SYNONYM	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
FAMILIAR EXPRESSION			x			x	x		x	
SUMMARY	x	x	x		x	x				
REFLECTION OF A MOOD OR SITUATION			x			x		x	x	
SIMILE	x	x								
APPOSITION	x	x					x		x	
ANTONYM	x	x								
GROUPINGS	x	x							x	
PICTURE CLUES		x				x	x		x	x
LEXICAL CLUES		x								
RELATIONAL CLUES		x								
INTERPRETIVE CLUES		x						x		
SEMANTIC CLUES				x						
INFERENCES				x				x		x
FIGURES OF SPEECH				x						
IDIOMS				x						
CAUSE AND EFFECT	x								x	
SYNTACTIC CLUES				x			x		x	x
EXAMPLE CLUES	x						x			x

Table 3 (continued)

Context clue	methodology textbooks									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
BUILDING BLOCK CLUES								x		
REFERRAL CLUES									x	
MAIN IDEA									x	
PREPOSITION									x	
RESTATEMENT										x

Table 3 presents the twenty-seven context clues and which textbook suggested the teaching of these context clues. For example, the context clue Definition was suggested by all textbook authors and the context clue Examples was suggested by authors C, F and I.

An analysis of Table 2 reveals that the authors of the ten methodology texts used are not in total agreement as to which context clues are important. All the authors believe context clues are useful but few give concrete examples for teaching and some authors don't define the context clues. Our first intention for this study was to compile a priortized list of context clues according to the various authors. A review of Table 3 will indicate to the reader the context clues and the number of authors who deem the context clues important.

BASAL READER ANALYSIS

Three Basal Reading Series K-6 were used for this study. We used D.C. Heath's American Readers (1983), Ginn and Company (1984), and Scott, Foresman (1983). Our first objective when analyzing the reader was to determine if there was a match from the category list generated from the methodology textbooks and then to classify the number of various context clues activities into Instruction,Review and Practice activities. In order to determine if this plan was feasible we selected contextual activities from each series and analyzed the activities to determine the type of clue and if the activity was instruction, review or practice. Our first discovery was that basal series do not name context clue activities. Most activities were listed as, "uses context" in pictures, meaning and syntax, word referents, pronouns, appropriate word meaning, unfamiliar words and identifying word meaning through context clues. As we tried to categorize the various activities with the definitions found in Table 3 we found that many context clue activities required the use of several definitions of context clues. For example, a practice workbook page would have

an item that an inference clue was needed and another item that a comparison or contrast clue was needed. We soon found out that we couldn't categorize the activities into specific context clues as described in Table 2.

We also found that each basal had their own definition of what they considered as instruction, practice, review etc. We therefore decided to use the classification used by each basal series to report our findings.

To locate activities that were considered to be context clue activities we used the activities found in the Teacher's Manual and workbook pages. We used the Scope and Sequence charts, where available, and the index in each level book. We examined all activities referred to as "use of context."

Scott, Foresman

Scott, Foresman listed of context clues under word identification and comprehension. Under word identification the activities were listed as: pictures, meaning and syntax. Under comprehension the activities were listed as: word referents, pronouns, adverbs, appropriate word meaning and unfamiliar words. Scott, Foresman uses a cycle approach to teaching skills. Skill units follow the pattern of Teach - Practice - Apply - Asses - Reteach(optional) - Reinforce(optional) - and Enrich(optional). Using Scott, Foresman's following definitions within this pattern of teaching we analyzed the K-6 books:

TEACH: Pupils are taught through materials in Pupil Book or Teacher's Edition.

PRACTICE: Pupils do practice exercises from Pupil Book or Teacher's Edition.

APPLY: Pupils apply skills just taught to the reading of a selection in Pupil Book or materials in Teacher's Edition.

ASSESS: Pupils are assessed through materials in Pupil Book or Teacher's Edition.

RETEACH: Teacher can use material in Teacher's Edition to teteach skills if necessary.

REINFORCE: Teacher can use materials in Teacher's Edition to give pupils extra practice on skills previously taught.

Table 4 presents an analysis of Scott, Foresman's "uses" of context program.

Table 4

Contextual activities: Scott, Foresman

Grades Level	Exposure	Teach	Practice	Apply	Assess	Reteach	Reinforce	Vocabulary**
K	2*							
1		22	11	5	5	6	15	
2		2	2	0	0	2	5	
3		5	30	5	4	4	6	6
4		11	25	23	10	5	8	
5		7	17	16	8	5	11	
6		6	20	23	6	8	5	
Total	2	53	105	72	33	33	50	6

* Two lessons were considered exposure prior to formal instruction.

** Six lessons were called extension of vocabulary.

Ginn and Company

Ginn and Company categorizes context clues only under vocabulary. Some found in Ginn would possibly be associated with a "uses" context clue in Scott, Foresman. For example the skill of word referent. Ginn classifies activities as I - introductory instruction; P - practice activity; R - review activity and T - skill tested. Table 5 presents an analysis of Ginn and Company's context clue program.

Table 5

Contextual activities: Ginn and Company

Grade Level	Introduction to Instruction	Practice	Review	Test
1	1	5	3	
2		2	2	
3	2	11	6	1
4		16	6	4
5	1	4	2	1
6	1	5	1	1
Total	5	43	20	7

D. C. Heath

D. C. Heath categorizes context clues under the heading of a context clue in the index of the manual and in their scope and sequence materials. The context clue activities were classified under vocabulary skills. Further context clue activities were found in activities related to homographs, homophones and idioms. The sequence of teaching was classified as I - introduce, R - Review, M - Maintain, and T - Test. We have included a column titled P - Practice. We considered workbook pages to be a form of practice. Table 6 represents an analysis of D. C. Heath context clue program.

Table 6

Contextual Activities: D. C. Heath

Grade Levels	Introduce	Review	Maintain	Practice	Test
1	12	21	0	2	0
2	0	22	0	0	1
3	4	31	0	5	1
4	0	1	0	5	38
5	0	3	17	2	0
6	0	10	10	4	0
Total	16	88	27	18	40

SUMMARY OF BASAL ANALYSIS

We found that the three Basal Reading Series analyzed did not specify any particular classification of context clue. D.C. Heath did teach homophones, homographs and idioms through the use of context. A great many of the activities required the student to use experience to complete a thought. In order that the reader can understand the teaching found in the basal series we have included some examples.

1. Look at the picture in row 1. I will say a sentence with a word missing. Tell me the name of a picture that makes sense in the sentence and begins with the _____ sound.

2. You can use a hammer to hit a n____.

3. The cat is in my h_____. (ride, house, her)

4. To keep his hands warm, Jerry put on his gl_v_s. (glad, gloves, hats)

5. The flames spread very fast. Two small villages were completely ruined by the holocaust.
   a. rainstorm
   b. destruction by fire
   c. expensive building

6. The angry boy gave only a curt reply to the question.
   a. long; detailed
   b. short; abrupt
   c. peculiar; odd

7. Joel is prompt. I've never seen him arrive late.
   a. very slow
   b. not friendly
   c. on time

CONCLUSIONS

Is there a match between what methodology textbooks and basal reading series in regards to classifying context clues? The answer is no. Basal reading series do not teach a classification. Our study supports the findings of Amoriell and Hofler (1984) that semantic clues are most prevalent in the teaching activities found in basal reading series and that the experience

semantic type clue was widely developed. The writers had no intention of evaluating the context clue program of the three basal reading series. If the teacher is concerned about quantity Scott, Foresman was far ahead with 364 contextual activities followed by D.C. Heath with 189 activities and Ginn with 75 activities. One reason why Scott, Foresman had more activities was that many of the vocabulary introduction activities were categorized as vocabulary in context. We found some inconsistencies as to what was identified as context clue activities within the three series.

DISCUSSION

Although we were basically concerned with the classification of context clues we couldn't help noticing the types of activities which were classified as "user context." Little time was actually spent on applying the shell of contextual analysis. Most of the activities were related to isolated lessons in the manuals or workbooks. Many of the activities did not really teach students about the value of context because the missing word or selection of a correct word from a list of four, could already have been in a student's vocabulary and therefore no real need was shown for analyzing the sentences or paragraphs. It was apparent through the majority of activities that knowledge of a classification of context clues was not essential to doing the various activities but the use of context clues depends upon the student's general knowledge of the subject matter and his/her background of experiences.

It is the opinion of the writers that teaching a classification of context clues is not the answer. Also requiring our pre-service teachers to memorize a list of context clue categories is not the best way to prepare them to teach contextual analysis. We need to have more creative and meaningful activities if we really want children to see the value of contextual analysis.

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